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Drive starts for sales tax hike for roads, mass transit

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Business and community groups took the first steps Tuesday to persuading Arizonans to raise the taxes on virtually everything they buy to build, widen and repair roads and fund a series of mass-transit projects — including a rail line from Tucson to Phoenix and perhaps beyond.

Group aims to aid state transit with tax hike [<http://www.eastvalleytribune.com/story/114262>]
Governor backs new sales tax for roads, transit [<http://www.eastvalleytribune.com/story/114741>]

Papers filed with the Secretary of State's Office will allow the group, organized as the TIME Coalition, to start gathering signatures to put the \$42.6 billion project on the ballot. Time is running out: Backers need 153,365 signatures by July 3 to put the question to voters in November.

Realistically, that translates to at least 200,000 signatures, given the number that are routinely disqualified because of bad addresses and people not registered .

But Marty Shultz, treasurer of the committee formally named Transportation and Infrastructure Moving AZ's Economy, said he believes businesses that want all that new construction will provide him enough money to hire the paid circulators — and eventually to wage a campaign designed to get voters to raise their own sales taxes by a penny for every dollar they spend beginning Jan. 1, 2010, for the next 30 years. That computes out to everything from an additional dime on a movie ticket to \$250 more tacked on to the price of a \$25,000 car.

Many of those dollars for the campaign are likely to come from the construction industry. In fact, the chairman of the coalition is Doug Pruitt, chairman of Sundt Construction, a firm that makes money building roads and also has a \$135 million contract to build part of the current Valley light-rail project.

Exactly what taxpayers would get for that \$42.6 billion, however, is not yet in cement. In fact, there is nothing in the 15-page initiative — the document Arizonans are being asked to sign and eventually enact into law — that spells out a single road that will be constructed.

Instead, Shultz, a lobbyist for Arizona Public Service Co., said he expects the state Transportation Board to approve a priority list next month. That list, he said, will form the basis for what will be financed.

Even that, however, would not be legally guaranteed: Shultz said changes could be made if the state's growth patterns defy projections during the 30-year life of the tax.

Still, the initiative does contain some general categories.

The biggest chunk of the money — more than \$23 billion — is specifically earmarked for "strategic highway

projects,” including freeways and other state highways that will be identified as priorities.

Preliminary studies have included widening all of Arizona’s interstate highways as well as new lanes and improvements on many of the current two-lane roads.

Cities, counties and tribes would divide up an additional \$8.5 billion in revenue to spend on their own priorities.

The balance includes money for bikeways, scenic roads, protecting neighborhoods — and more than \$7.6 billion for mass transit, with the lion’s share of that designated for that proposed intercity passenger rail service.

Shultz said the general idea of the rail service is to have it run from Tucson through Phoenix and perhaps beyond to Wickenburg, Prescott and even into northern Arizona.

On the Valley’s light-rail plans, Shultz said systems that have been built in other cities “have immediately blown the doors off” usage estimates. He predicted the same result in Arizona when the light-rail system being built from Phoenix to Mesa begins operating in December.



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